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SHORTER ARTICLES AND DISCUSSION

VARIATION AND CORRELATION IN THE MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN

SOMEWHERE in sociological literature we have met with the statement that whereas the mean age at marriage of men differs from district to district because of social and economic conditions, the mean age at marriage of women varies but little because of these factors. In view of the high "assortative mating" coefficient¹ for age of bride and groom, this statement seemed so remarkable as to be open to question.

Its validity can be very easily tested provided the mean age at marriage of men and women from a series of districts differing in economic and social conditions are available. If the mean age of women is independent of these conditions, or far less dependent upon them than that of men, one should find (i) that the variation of mean age of brides is lower than that of mean age of grooms, and (ii) that for a series of districts the coefficient of correlation between the mean age of brides and grooms is very low.

The only suitable series of data that we have been able to find is that given by A. Dumont² for the average age in years and months at first marriage of the males and females of the 87 departments of France. Grouping his data in classes of five months' range, we find, in terms of months:³

¹ See Lutz, *Science*, N. S., Vol. 22, pp. 249-250, 1905. For a general review of the literature of assortative mating see Harris, *Pop. Sci. Mo.*, Vol. 80, pp. 476-492, 1912.

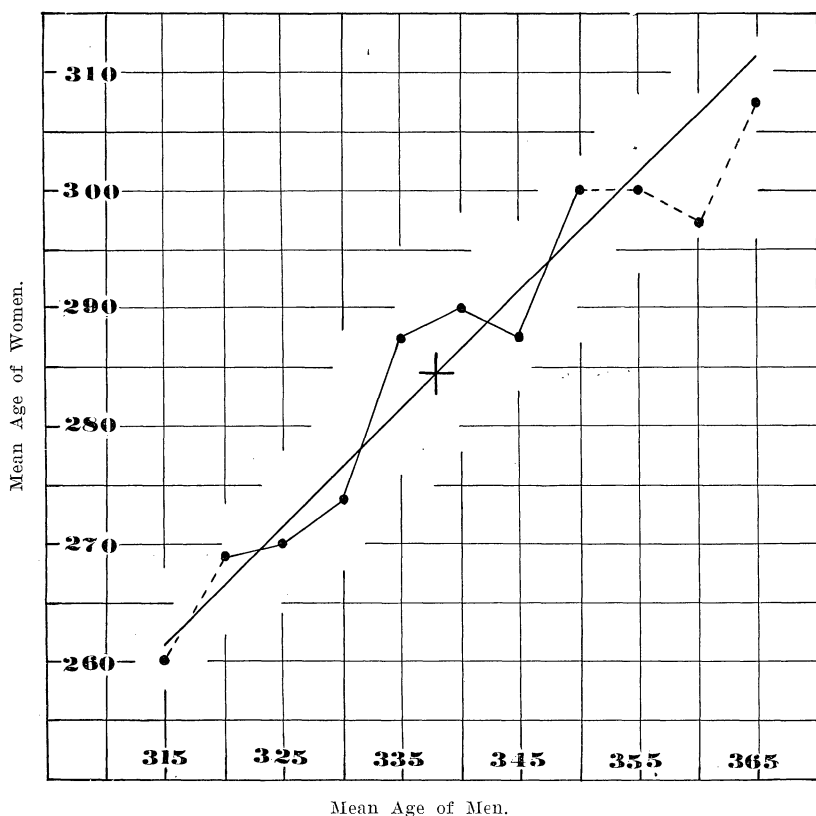
² Dumont, A., *Rev. Ecole Anthropol. Paris*, Vol. 14, p. 163, 1904.

³ The results given by the ungrouped data are:

	For Men	For Women
Mean	337.87 ± .83	284.45 ± 1.01
Standard deviation	11.49 ± .59	14.00 ± .72
Coefficient of variation	3.40 ± .17	4.92 ± .25
Considering the shortness of the series, the results are in as good agreement as could be expected.		

	For Men	For Women
Mean	337.76 ± .80	284.43 ± 1.03
Standard deviation ⁴	11.03 ± .56	14.25 ± .73
Coefficient of variation	3.26 ± .17	5.01 ± .26

⁴ Without Sheppard's correction for the second moment.



We note that the women marry on an average about four years and five months younger than the men. Contrary to what we have been told, their mean age at marriage both absolutely, as measured by the standard deviation, and relatively, as measured by the coefficient of variation is *more* variable than that of men. The difference in standard deviations for the ungrouped material is $2.51 \pm .93$ and for the grouped records $3.22 \pm .92$. These are 2.71 and 3.49 times their probable error, and hence perhaps significant. For the coefficient of variation, the differences by the two methods are $1.52 \pm .31$ and $1.74 \pm .31$. These are 5.69 and 4.96 times their probable errors and their significance is even more probable than those for the standard deviations.

The correlation coefficient from the grouped data by the product moment method, using the means and standard deviations given above, is

$$r_{mf} = .781 \pm .028.^5$$

Thus on a scale of -1 to $+1$ the interdependence of mean ages of men and women is very close indeed.⁶ Expressing the same relationship in terms of regression by the well known formula

$$f = \left(\bar{f} - r \frac{\sigma_f}{\sigma_m} \bar{m} \right) + r \frac{\sigma_f}{\sigma_m} m,$$

where the bars indicate population means and the sigmas population standard deviations of m = males and f = females,

$$f = -56.474 + 1.009 m.$$

Thus we see that each month's increase in average male age is followed by a month's increase in mean female age. The fit of the straight line to the empirical means as shown in the diagram is excellent—considering the small number of the district means from which the equation is deduced.

Thus the available data show that the mean age at marriage of women instead of being less variable from district to district than that of men is actually more variable—both absolutely and relatively.

In short, there is, as far as our data go, no evidence for the assertion that while the time of marriage of men is closely dependent upon the complex of social and economic conditions that of women is practically independent of them.

We have published this note in the hope that it may suggest to some one with the opportunities of obtaining really adequate data an investigation of the problem which has several rather important points of interest.

J. ARTHUR HARRIS,
ROXANA H. VIVIAN

COLD SPRING HARBOR

⁵ The difference method applied to the ungrouped material gives

$$r = .763 \pm .030.$$

The difference is of no significance.

⁶ Possibly, however, the relationship is in part spurious. The mean of males and females were taken on the basis of the same N , or approximately the same N , for the various districts. Data for investigating this question are not available. The point should be borne in mind by a subsequent worker.